DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 789 CE 065 676

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TITLE Views, Beliefs, & Opinions of Business Education by State Employment Service Managers in the Pacific Northwest, Secondary Principals in the Pacific Northwest, Chief State School Officers throughout the United States, State Directors of Employment & Training throughout the U.S.
PUB DATE 3 Dec 93
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the American Vocational Association Convention (Nashville, TN, December 3, 1993).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; *Business Education; Comparative Analysis; Educational Attitudes; *Educational Needs; *Employment Services; High Schools; *Principals; *Secondary School Curriculum
IDENTIFIERS *Pacific Northwest

ABSTRACT

State employment service managers in the Pacific Northwest, secondary principals in the Pacific Northwest, chief state school officers throughout the United States, and state directors of employment and training throughout the United States were asked to rate students on a list of 15 attributes seen as key to performance on the job. Their responses indicated that, although students and their parents are satisfied with present-day education, employers are not. Sixty executives responding to a survey felt that the following should be an integral part of high school education: at least one business course; a course in handling personal finances; and training in critical thinking and problem-solving skills, computer applications, and keyboarding. Only 34% of the principals expressed support for a one- or two-semester course for and about business for all secondary students, whereas 86.7 percent of the state directors of employment and training supported such a course. The state directors of employment also rated the importance of business communications, business math, small business management, management functions, marketing and distribution significantly higher than the educators did. All four groups surveyed were fairly neutral regarding the importance of economics and consumer economics to secondary curricula. (MN)

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VIEWS, BELIEFS, & OPINIONS OF BUSINESS EDUCATION BY STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE MANAGERS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST SECONDARY PRINCIPALS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES STATE DIRECTORS OF EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING THROUGHOUT THE US

by

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Business Education Research Conference
AVA Convention
Friday, December 3, 1993
Nashville, Tennessee

The time is now for one comprehensive business course to become a requirement for high school graduation in all 50 states. Business Educators, particularly business teacher educators, must actively and enthusiastically join forces with AVA, NBEA, Delta Pi Epsilon, Future Business Leaders of America, Business Professionals of America, DECA, and others -- such as Economics America (the National Council on Economic Education) -- to influence law makers and policy makers to make at least one one- or two-semester course for and about business a requirement for high school graduation throughout the country.

My research and others indicates strongly that business education is viewed positively by state employment service managers, secondary principals, chief state school officers and state directors of employment and training as well as business leaders and executives throughout the nation. The time for business and economic education to become a "required" rather than an "elective" component of public education is overdue.

Let's look at the evidence:

On Wednesday, April 15, 1992, at the Opening General Session of the NBEA Convention in Boston, Jeff White, Chairman of the Board of Equifax, Inc., stated that **"Business should be part of the curriculum of every high school student."** This concern is echoed by American businesses who are having difficulty finding employees equipped with basic business skills and competencies.

Likewise, a review of recent literature indicates that what employers in the workplace want and the curriculum students are required to take in high school are out of sync. A study sponsored by the Committee for Economic Development asked four different groups to rate students on a list of 15 attributes seen as key to performance on the job. The results show that students and their parents are satisfied with education as it is now. Employers are not.

A study of business executives in New Jersey in 1991 reveals much the same attitude as the employment service managers in the Pacific Northwest. Sixty executives responding to a survey agree or strongly agree that the following **should be an integral part of a high school education:**

1. All high school graduates should have some competency in computer applications.
2. **All students should be required to complete at least one business course before graduating high school.**
3. All students should be capable of using critical thinking and problem-solving skills in the areas of communications, computer applications, and general business studies.
4. All students should be required to complete a course in handling personal finances.
5. All students should possess keyboarding skills before graduating high school.

The business executives also indicated considerable support for:

6. The study of business education should be a vital part of a high school's comprehensive curriculum.

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7. Some business courses should be accepted as Carnegie units to meet college admission requirements.

8. All students should have the opportunity to enroll in a cooperative education program where students can combine work and school for credit.

9. All students should possess knowledge of entrepreneurship (i.e, starting, organizing, and managing a small business.

Unfortunately, in most high schools, these courses are not required or strongly recommended for virtually all students.

My research presents a similar picture. When State Employment Service Managers in the Pacific Northwest (Oregon, Washington, & Idaho) were asked: **"Do you feel a two-semester course for and about business would be beneficial for all secondary students?"** The response was 88.4 percent "yes," 11.6 "no or undecided."

There was a significant difference between the state employment service managers and the secondary school principals from the same region (Pacific Northwest). Only 34 percent of the principals supported the need for a one- or two-semester course for and about business for virtually all students. However, 70 percent of the principals agreed or were neutral. Only 30 percent were opposed.

Early returns from a survey of Chief State School Officers and State Directors of Employment and Training are encouraging and largely consistent with earlier research.

An encouraging 86.7 percent of State Directors of Employment and Training agree or strongly agree that a one- or two-semester course for and about business and marketing should be strongly recommended for virtually all high school students. Only 43.8 percent of the Chief State School Officers (CSSO's) agree or strongly agree that such a course should be strongly recommended for all students but 25 percent of the CSSO's strongly agreed and 75 percent of them strongly agreed, agreed, or were neutral.

The opposition is not strong! In fact support is very encouraging.

What topics, modules, or competencies should be included in such a course. Again there appears to be a consensus rather than division.

THE TOP TEN/ELEVEN

STATE EMPLOYMENT MANAGERS PNW	PRINCIPALS PACIFIC NW	STATE DIRECTORS EMPLOYMT/TRNG	CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS
Responsibility Self-Management	Decision Making Critical Thinking	Responsibility Self-Management	Decision Making Critical Thinking
Decision Making Critical Thinking	Human Relations Skills	Human Relations	Typing/Keyboarding
Career Awareness	Typing/Keyboarding	Career Awareness	Human Relations Skills
Human Relation Skills	Career Awareness	Decision Making Critical Thinking	Leadership Development
Future Employment Opportunities	Responsibility & Self-Management	Typing/Keyboarding	Future Employment Opportunities
Typing/Keyboarding	Future Employment Opportunity	Future Employment Opportunity	Word Processing
Leadership Development	Leadership Development	Leadership Development	Business Communications

Business Math	Word Processing	Business Communications	Microcomputer Applications
STATE EMPLOYMENT MANAGERS PNW	**PRINCIPALS PACIFIC NW**	**STATE DIRECTORS EMPLOYMT/TRNG**	**CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS**
Business Communications	Microcomputer Applications	Word Processing	Career Awareness
Word Processing	Consumer Economics	Microcomputer Applications	Responsibility Self-Management
Microcomputer Applications	Economics	Consumer Economics	Economics

A comparison between the employment service managers and principals in the Pacific Northwest revealed a significant difference, in the mean responses at the .01 level of significance (with the employment service managers more in favor) of these competencies: Business Communications, Business Math, Small Business Management, Management, Marketing and Distribution.

A similar comparison has not, but will be done for the State Directors of Employment and Training and the Chief State School Officers once the follow-up survey results are received and compiled.

The indicators are that there is disagreement between the educators and the employment specialists about the need for and value of business math and business communications. Business math and business communications are not valued highly by educators but are valued by employment specialists.

The literature reveals that business and industry are devoting two-thirds of their almost $50 billion in training dollars to improve communication skills. The specific communication skills businesses are developing include interpersonal and listening skills, word processing, speaking, writing, and conducting business meetings. (Honl, 1992)

Business math is the math used by business, industry, and financial institutions. It involves problem solving and decision making as well as calculations and computations. Teaching business math involves applying basic concepts to real-world situations. Business math is not even offered in many high schools.

There was a fairly neutral response by all four groups with respect to economics and consumer economics in the secondary curriculum. This is the case even though 28 states require a course in economics and/or consumer economics for high school graduation. This mandate occurred largely through the efforts of Economics America, the National Council for Economic Education, and the State Councils for Economic Education with Centers for Economic Education at major colleges and universities throughout the nation. This network has increased the awareness and need for economic education in schools, K-12.

The lowest responses for what should be strongly recommended in a secondary curriculum for virtually all students include: marketing and distribution, small business management, management functions, civil, criminal and personal law, taxes, and accounting.

THE BOTTOM SEVEN

STATE EMPLOYMENT MANAGERS PNW	PRINCIPALS PACIFIC NORTHWEST	STATE DIRECTORS EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING	CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS
Marketing & Distributions	Management Functions	Civil, Criminal, Personal, Law	Marketing & Distributions

Small Business Mgt	Small Business Mgt	Accounting	Small Business Mgt
Management F inctions	Marketing & Dist.	Small Business Mgt	Taxes
Electronic Spreadsheets	Electronic Spreadsheets	Marketing & Distribution	Civil, Criminal, & Personal Law
Economics	Business Math	Taxes	Accounting
STATE EMPLOYMENT MANAGERS PNW	**PRINCIPALS PACIFIC NORTHWEST**	**STATE DIRECTORS EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING**	**CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS**
Civil, Criminal, Personal Law	Business Communication	Management Functions	Consumer Economics
Taxes	Civil, Criminal, Personal, Law	Economics	Management Functions
Consumer Economics	Taxes	Electronic Spreadsheets	Business Math

Wow! How do you respond to this information? What are we teaching in the high schools and are our priorities in the right areas? Maybe not. What is being emphasized in our business teacher education curriculum and methods courses? Is it accounting, economics, business law, marketing, and management? Are we offering an obsolete product which does not best meet the needs of our customers?

Before we start beating up on our business teacher education programs and our secondary teachers we should look at the cup as being at least half full and not half empty.

Remember the "bottom seven" were in response to competencies "virtually all students should have at the secondary level." And, at the bottom of the list the responses were at about 50% of agreement by the educators and the employment specialists.

In addition, business educators at the secondary and post-secondary level have responded very positively to the demand for microcomputer applications, word processing, and keyboarding. Most of us had to undergo massive retraining and attitude adjustment. We've had to learn new hardware and software every semester or so. We've had to find the resources necessary to teach computer applications and develop curriculum and learning activities at an alarming rate. All over the country business educators have responded and accepted this tremendous challenge.

Is it any wonder we may have inadvertently neglected other parts of our curriculum? Probably not. Most of us also devote considerable time and effort to our student organizations and competitive events. Here we concentrate heavily on responsibility/self management, decision making/critical thinking, leadership development and human relation skills.

The area we need to concentrate on and rethink is where **we place too much emphasis on one or two other subjects at the expense of other topics** which deserve some exposure at the secondary level. We need to reconsider offering an entire year of accounting to a dwindling number of students. In Idaho teachers are experimenting with teaching accounting in six to nine week blocks.

An entire semester of law, let alone a full year, is probably too much. We need to offer a broader more integrated course or two which includes modules of varying lengths which allow students to explore a more comprehensive variety of business subjects. **This course becomes the one- or two- semester course for and about business required or strongly recommended for virtually all high school students** advocated by employment specialists and business executives. Such a course would include modules in general business, economics, international business, introduction to marketing, business and personal law, business math, business communications, career awareness, interviewing and job skills, accounting, small business management, notetaking skills, and microcomputer applications.

Although it is not a requirement for high school graduation, such a course is being offered in

approximately 50 percent of the high schools in Idaho. It has become a popular course for students, business teachers, school administrators, and the business education state supervisor. In Idaho we call it "**Business Technology.**" In Connecticut it is called, "A Comprehensive Business Curriculum.

A Business Technology Curriculum Guide has been developed and is available through the University of Idaho Curriculum Dissemination Center, College of Education Room 209, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, 83844-8303, 885-6556 (phone), 885-6869 (fax) for $10.00. It is also in the process of adoption by the Idaho State Division of Vocational Education, 650 West State Street, Boise, Idaho, 83720-3650.